

# Torah & the Law

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Hi, I'm MaryElizabeth Royce and I'm talking about the Torah and the Law.

The Hebrew word Torah is difficult to define. It can mean both the Law as a set of commandments given by God to the Israelites and also refer to the first five books of Jewish scripture, representing the T in Tanakh. Torah as a verb and noun can be defined as instruction, teaching, and Law. These encompass a variety of meanings and interpretations. For the sake of this research, the defining characteristic of the Torah that is being focused on is that of the Law and legal issues and how Jewish practices and behaviors are treated.

The five books of the Tanakh are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Rabbinic literature and Jewish practice find their fundamental roots in these five books and have been debated, studied, and critiqued over the centuries.

Within the genre of Law within the Torah, the lessons and legal practices are shaped and molded into a distinct narrative. Most notably is the narrative of Moses and the Ten Commandments, which make up the Decalogue. Moses goes to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, after which he descends with the written and oral decree of God as to how the Israelites were to live their lives. These Commandments were written onto stone tablets and were to be respected and revered as law. The Law is repeated throughout the Torah, thus leading to the naming of these first five books of the Tanakh, the torat Moshe, or the instruction of Moses.

In Matthew, Jesus speaks to elaborate and explain the Torah and Jewish practices in a way that is crafted to expand and intensify, rather than abolish Jewish Law. There is a phrase called "building a fence around the Torah." This means mandating a particular practice to have restrictions that go above and beyond what is originally written in order to ensure that the law is not broken. Two examples are adultery and murder.

Adultery in the decalogue appears in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. They all have the same basic principle that one should not commit adultery. Adultery is therefore, up for interpretation. The fence is built in the gospel of Matthew. Jesus restates the law that one should not commit adultery. Then, he expands that law to include lust in the realm of adultery, hence building a fence. This sort of expansion occurs multiple times throughout the gospel of Matthew as Jesus creates a much more rigid and definitive set of laws to follow, leaving little to further interpretation.

In regards to punishment and justice, the Law outlines concepts of justified retaliation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discussed the “eye for an eye” analogy. This verse addresses how God prescribes when and how an injury is to be justified and how unjust bloodshed should not occur. Matthew seems to cross reference Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, all with slightly variant phrasing.

Marriage is another topic that is commonly discussed in the Law. It was a social arrangement to be encouraged and protected by God and the law. There are extensive rules regarding chastity and what constitutes as lust, adultery, and incest. Incest in Jewish practice is abhorrent. Whenever nakedness is mentioned, coitus, or sex is the parallel meaning. It is important to note that the nakedness of a woman is sacred. This law is outlined explicitly in Leviticus and referenced in Matthew 5.32. Leviticus reads that “none of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness; I am the Lord” then goes on to describe specific instances under that umbrella statement.

The topic of divorce is also a lengthy portion of Jewish law and practice. The law of divorce is discussed in Deuteronomy 24 and expanded upon by Jesus in Matthew 5.31 and 32. The summation of the law gives the husband the power of writing and distributing a certificate of divorce given that the husband never takes the wife back as his again, for she had been defiled by his person. There must also be solid grounds of infidelity in order to justify the divorce.

This goes hand in hand with levirate marriage. This is a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother’s widow. But he must be dead.

Otherwise that is considered incest as a wife and husband are one and the same flesh until death. Levirate marriage shows up in the discussion of Jesus' genealogy in the first book of Matthew in regards to Tamar.

In short, the Torah and the Law is a complex and convoluted concept. What is written in the first five books of the Tanakh, the Decalogue, and Jewish practice and behavior all create a foundation for Judaism. The gospel of Matthew provides a source of interpretation through Jesus' explanations and elaborations.

Here are my works cited. And thank you so much for watching.

#### Works Cited

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